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I Am What I Am As I Am

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Abstract

I started writing paper as a way to explain the struggle of living a spiritual life on earth but it quickly turned into something far more metaphysical than I intended. Indeed, if one were to say that this work is more spiritual or theosophical than philosophical I would not mind. If you need to place this into some category of philosophy you could say this work is a critical exposition upon the relationship between 'being' and 'living'.

You can see, therefore, how the intend topic is related to the one now present in this work. The struggle of living a spiritual life is a more earthly manifestation of the relationship between existence and creation which can also be written as the relationship between 'being' and 'living'. However, if you read the work you will realise that such distinctions do not matter. There is no way around it, my work is a reflection of me and I am what I am as I am.

I Am What I Am As I Am

The term 'spiritual life' appears to be rather contradictory. 'Spirit' implies 'being' or 'existence', something beyond living, while 'life' and 'living' are things belonging to creation. Life is creation. Spirit is not. Existence and creation are two different things; just as something can 'be' but not 'live'. However, they are not opposites. One envelopes the other. One is somewhat greater than the other: At least in the sense of birthing the other.

Existence envelopes creation. All that lives exists but the same cannot be said about all that exists. There are some things which exist but do not live; unless we mean they metaphysically "live" through actually living things. For example, memories and ideas live through us but, substantially, they exist. Their manifestations, through actions, whether great or small actually do live but a sorrowful tear, for example, is not the memory itself. It is only the manifestation of a memory. The memory is the 'noumenon'ⁱ and the tear is the 'phenomenon'. One is abstract while the other is concrete. The tear expresses the memory which subsists in our minds.ⁱⁱ

There is another type of thing which exists but does not live; though it did live at one time. That would be anything which is dead. For something can only be dead if it first lived.ⁱⁱⁱ The dead exist though they do not live. Again, they may live on as something else, *Ashes to ashes dust to dust*^{iv} - DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), but, again, they are something else. Creation, therefore, is always a subset of existence. The hands of the Maker are always subject to the will of the Begetter.^v

However, there also arises an interesting conundrum. A master-slave dialectic if you will. Existence without creation lacks one vital thing: Experience.

It is through manifested life that existence acts upon its potential through experience. The 'idea' is just potential without being manifested / brought into living life so that it may find and act upon purpose so now we can see that though things can exist without being created they really cannot "be" all that they are in potential without "becoming". Hence, for all of human existence, we have studied representations of abstract things never, outright, the abstract things themselves. However, in so doing we have glimpsed beyond the veil of creation into existence and that is a good start.

Together, the sorrowful memory and its expression are a living being called the tear.^{vi} Apart the memory 'exists' and the 'tear' is yet to be; let alone live. One could say the tear, not yet created, exists as part of the memory in the form of its physical potential. Of course, we must also realise, that a memory, unless it is false, is always a thing already manifested. Hence, the present manifestation of a past thing is always the past's transmuted form.

To the extent that the present is the future that has become, the future, too, is transmuted by the present. To the extent as well that the present is the future already brought to life the future has past and is once again the past transmuted by present conditions. The spiritual life, therefore, is one of 'becoming', expression coming into tangible form, but what does that really mean and what are we really studying?

Humans, as they are now, are incapable of directly studying existence. To study is to think and, at its most extreme, is to philosophise. The beginning of existence is where philosophy stops and wisdom begins. Hence, the further away from creation the mind wanders the more it becomes lost as it ponders.

Funnily enough, to the extent that creation is part of existence, and it is an absolute part wholly enveloped, the mind is always lost as it ponders. I feel this same knowing when I read Wittgenstein as he writes, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”^{vii}. The full quotation is as follows:

1. “The world is everything that is the case.
2. What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts.
3. The logical picture of the facts is the thought.
4. The thought is the significant proposition.
5. Propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions.
(An elementary proposition is a truth function of itself.)
6. The general form of truth-function is The general form of truth-function is $[p, \xi, N(\xi)]$ ^{viii}. This is the general form of proposition.
7. **Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.”**

To him I reply, “Where one cannot think one must be silent”. When thinking is of no value one should just feel and when feeling is no longer of value one should just be. Therefore, where thinking ends and silence begins knowing will be.

Philosophy uses words and symbols to find truth and know God but the closer we get to The Source the more our language starts to convolute: The more we sound like we are rambling, talking nonsense or becoming sophists. It is usually then, when we start to sound like we should be condemned to the institution, that we may realise, if we have but a mustard seed of wisdom, that we should shut up! and refrain from sharing our thoughts with others or, better yet, *Be still and know*^{ix}.

In my estimation, many philosophers do too much guessical talking and are too loud with their whispering faux intellectualism. If we are to lead a spiritual life we must shut up! The spiritual life is a process of becoming silent. Now, how do we get there and why must we get there this way? In short, why does the spiritual life require us to throw off Descartes^x in favour of me? Much of what I am saying now may seem more theosophical than philosophical but can such

be avoided when the metaphysical lies so close to other realms of endeavour; in particular the religious. It is as Paget Henry says in his exposition on Afro-Caribbean Philosophy,

“... In spite of its quest for universal and ahistorical truths, philosophical production, like all discursive production, is rooted in history and shaped by the cultural context in which it is practiced consequently, in some societies (or in different periods of the same society) philosophy may be inseparable from religion (Hindu philosophy), from science (positivism), or from politics (Marxism). Thus, in spite of its current presentation of self in Western academia, philosophy has never been a pure isolated form of contemplation. It has always had real organic connections to human self-understanding, and thus to the other discourses that are also engaged in this vital undertaking”^{xi}.

There is, indeed, an ever-present materiality to philosophy which is often ignored by those who consider them purist but what is purity of human thought without being enveloped in the murky waters of all that is human? As we go close to existential questions, what seems further away from earthly concerns, we soon realise that we, too, go closer to the “forms”, “hypostases”, “Noumena” or “Spirits” underlying our lives. In short, the philosophical is nothing without lived experience and lived experience is surely more a collection of interconnected things than isolated happenings. Hence, there can be no real philosophy which involves questions of humanity that is ahistorical since all of history is a record of life and all of its many facets.

Life is Dialectical

Arguably, the most glaring example of living a spiritual life can be found in the saying *Be in the world but not of it*. Juxtaposed with the religious refrain *On earth as it is in Heaven* and the gnostic refrain *As above so below* we get the sense that to live a spiritual life is to actively seek ‘truth’, to gain intimate knowledge of The Source, over one’s lifetime.

It may appear as though I am implying that ‘spirit’ and ‘life’ are distinct and opposite things but gaining that impression and failing to disabuse yourself of it would be a mistake. That sort of reasoning is too dualistic. Too linear. There is too much dichotomy. In fact, there should be none of that at all.

The universe, world and human beings are multifaceted and dialectical; not linear. Let us define ‘dialectic logic’ quickly so you can understand the mode in which the following is written. Kinney, in explaining Plato’s dialectic gives the following definition. “Dialectic is the path the soul must traverse in order to glimpse the true realities and, ultimately, to be brought within the aura of the highest reality, the Good.”^{xii} In simple language, Dialectic is a type of logic which aims at finding absolute truth. This definition, though telling us what dialectics is and its aim, does not tell us what its method is.

I found this next definition of Dialectic in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. “Dialectics is a term used to describe a method of philosophical argument that involves some sort of contradictory process between opposing sides.”^{xiii} This definition is a most clumsy one but it does say something which the previous one did not. It shows that the method used to produce a principle using dialectics is contradiction. Hence, we find that the Socratic method of oppositional dialogues found in Plato’s dialogues and American law schools is somewhat dialectical. What it does not explain is that those contradictions come from the thing being observed and not external observations as may be the case with person A vs person B arguments found in Plato’s form of dialectic and in Common-law courts.

The form of dialectic we are discussing here is often called the Hegelian dialectic. It is often not understood since Western dialectic has found itself used mainly by those in continental philosophy and has been explained in the most obscure ways. Hegel’s dialectic is

often explained as thesis, anti-thesis; synthesis but this has since been attributed to Johann Fichte.^{xiv} Hegel used the terms, 'concrete', 'abstract' and 'absolute' but for our purposes here we can call the sets similar enough to be coterminous though the extent to which they are the same is dubious.^{xv} Let us now contextualise dialectic by the things being studied.

Dialectically it would be best to think about spirit and life as interconnected yet relatively distinct things where distinction is necessary for understanding each as its own thing but their connectedness is necessary as well to understand what each is as part of a whole. These entities, we can call them nature, explain themselves and itself by the internal contradictions found in their behaviour and how they interact with themselves and how it interacts with itself. Thus, understanding something as part of a whole lets us, in turn, understand each as itself alone. In short, the thing in itself shows what it is not.

Put another way, the part explains the whole and the whole explains the part. The part when viewed by itself explains itself and explains everything it is not and everything it is not explains itself and everything it is not as well. The second 'everything it is not', is the part we first discussed while the first 'everything it is not' is the part we discussed secondly. There are two parts, both sharing distinct personalities but still connected to each other as the whole. They negate and make each other and, in so doing, advance our knowledge about everything they are and everything they are not. Things go on and on that in that manner until we reach a final truth. That does not mean that we need to reduce everything to zero. It means that we need to interrogate until we have built a case that explains without needing to be explained by anything else or itself. It will be self-evident.

It is not a far stretch to argue that the struggles of life teach us as much, if not more, about Spirit and higher virtues than merely pondering upon them can. In many ways, to live is

to pursue the truth of all creation and what lies beyond it. Through living we learn about ourselves, the world around us, our place in existence and the fact that existence can persist without us if it chooses. The latter point is so poignant that we must wonder what relevance we really have in the Universe and whether we can really ever only use thought to understand it when using thought implies centring ourselves within or above the universe at some point when the Universe may have nothing to do with us or our perception of it at all. The extent to which we can follow Protagoras' famous aphorism that, "Man is the measure of all things"^{xvi} is quite dubious but clarity may come as we take a more spiritual approach to humanity. Certainly man's pondering is not the measure of all things but man's understanding of things, regardless of his pondering, is certainly the measure of his sagacity.

Our mortality is what makes us spiritual beings and that is a scary thing. Let us not be confused with quasi-dogmatic popular expression *We are spiritual beings having a human experience*. We are not. Again, too much dichotomous thinking. Saying *We are spiritual beings having a human experience* implies that the human experience is something other than a spiritual experience. While some may believe that to be the case, I know it is not.

Here are two propositions in support of my argument. The first is that if all of creation is a bi-product of spirit then experiencing creation is also experiencing spirit. Afterall, you must first 'be' before you can live. Nothing lives outside of existence. Arguably, however, one can exist outside of existence.

Existing outside of existence is possible but that "existing" would no longer be existence. We would need a new word to fully understand it and I do not think the word "Be" would suffice. To 'be' is to 'existence'. Hence, while we live inside of existence as a form of being. We can exist without living and we can 'be' without existing at all. The last point seems

closed to us but it may well be open to us if we can consider existence as the middle point of being, life as the lower point and a higher being to be that which exists outside of existence. Would it be right to say reside instead of exists so that we say something can reside outside of existence but that the word 'reside' only address locale: It does not address the 'existential' or, better yet, the Metaphysical question.

On the other hand, and more on the point, things like thoughts, ideas, memories, and dreams which exist without living. They only live when we act upon them in some way. In that regard, humans are conduits through which 'being' lives and may experience life.

The second proposition is this. If humans are not spiritual entities then we should be without spiritual experience. As we know we do have spiritual experiences^{xvii} and these experiences occur only through life. I would not, however, hypothesise that if we were only non-spirit we could not yearn to be spirit. Can a dog yearn to be human? Possibly, but would he? That question is a knot I do not feel like untangling right now. What we know is that yearning is a spiritual experience which, at least humans have, though we can also surmise that animals yearn as well since too express moments of pleasure and displeasure when a goal is met or unmet.

Some people yearn to be beautiful by society's standards while still being ugly by society's standards. Similarly, we can yearn to be spirit while not being spirit. However, *the proof of the pie is in its eating*^{xviii} and it has well been documented that we have spiritual experiences.

The striving for a more perfect union with God (Samadhi), as misguided as that is, and complete detachment from God (Moksha) whether through religion or other practice leading to Chokma (absolute knowledge) are but two examples of spirit yearning for Truth. In the former the person seeks to attain truth and self by finding God. In the second, the person

seeks to attain truth and self by finding where God is not but in finding where God is not surely we find God so what really is the difference between the two approaches? Possibly, a mere difference in method but containing the same aim.

Up until now, much of this dichotomous talk has implied that somehow spirit is pure and humanity is tainted. Such talk is a waste of time when we consider the fact that purity and impurity are irrelevant in the spiritual sense. What is important is growth and growth often involves *rising to the occasion* by overcoming / going through challenges. After all, there would be no point to living if life were perfect in the sense of needing no improvement. If, however, we see perfection as the most appropriate set of missteps on a march towards being whole then life is worth living. The issue I have, therefore, is living a life where, in my pursuit of my spiritual yearnings, I must struggle with my materials wants and needs.

True Light

For a long time I have had an issue with the perception that somehow light is better than darkness. Sometimes I wondered if it was just because of my race. Being a Black person, maybe I just disliked the fact that ‘dark’ and ‘darkness’ are often used as dramatic epithets in prose and poems. Take this quote from President Barack Obama, for example where he says, “The flame of the diya, or lamp, reminds us that light will ultimately triumph over darkness”^{xix}. Look as well to this quotation from ‘Abdu'l-Bahá head of the Bahá’í Faith from 1892 until 1921.^{xx}

“Then it is proved that there is no evil in existence; all that God created He created good. This evil is nothingness; so death is the absence of life. When man no longer receives life, he dies. Darkness is the absence of light: when there is no light, there is darkness. Light is an existing thing, but darkness is nonexistent. Wealth is an existing thing, but poverty is nonexistent.

As an extension of my wonder, I even questioned whether it was because, deep down, I consider the derogatory use of 'dark' by Black people a vestige of colonialism through internalised racism^{xxi} that I have such a visceral reaction to its use. However, those reasons never stuck with me. I always knew there was something more. I will not bury the lead. It is as simple as this.

Darkness and Evil, two things that we are taught to avoid, are analogised. Light somehow is seen as pure good, clean and next to godliness, and darkness as pure evil: An allusion to some devilishness. God is apparently a flame that will burn out all darkness but as we know shadows are a result of light. They are dark, indeed, but possibly not the darkness about which many speak. Darkness may be a metaphor for evil but where can we find this evil? Where is it? A preliminary answer may be found in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy where it is stated that,

“One theory of evil that provides a solution to the problem of evil is Manichaeism. According to Manichaeism, the universe is the product of an ongoing battle between two coequal and coeternal first principles: God and the Prince of Darkness. From these first principles follow good and evil substances which are in a constant battle for supremacy. The material world constitutes a stage of this cosmic battle where the forces of evil have trapped the forces of goodness in matter”^{xxii}.

It appears to me that the metaphor of darkness alludes to life. As we all know “live” is “evil” backwards but what encourages us to live? Not all that we see around us and how do we see whether at night or in the day? By glimmers of light. The true darkness, therefore, is the world around us and it is facilitated by the physical light which is the purveyor of the material world; also known now as metaphorical darkness. Physical darkness, on the other hand, in parallel to

physical light, would, therefore, have to be the purveyor of the metaphorical light; what we can now call the abstract, spirit or enlightenment: The true light.

When we are in darkness all we experience is ourselves. When in the light, we are distracted by everything else and our focus is removed from ourselves. People fear the dark because they feel unsafe. They can only rely upon themselves in the dark and it is quite hard to rely upon yourself when you do not know yourself. It is easier to study things than to study self. Maybe this is why many people meditate with eyes closed. Even in open-eyed meditation the world around us disappears.

The hardest struggle humanity faces is against light; for it is only light which shows us all of the things we call beautiful and ugly and it is these things which we allow to distract and capture our minds. To the extent that our other forms of consciousness and our spirit depend on our minds to experience the world they too are enraptured and dismayed. We are rendered shrouded in “darkness” but this darkness is filled with everything that is beautiful, ordinary and ugly around us: The people, things, sights, personalities and all other things which can be experienced; whether physical or abstract. Dialectically, the true darkness – as in the abyss of the lost – is everything around us which we experience and what external seeds we allow to grow within us and corrupt us while the true light is that which we can only experience when we explore within ourselves. The outside should only be used to cultivate the potential within us.

Let us not get caught up in dichotomous thinking. To a large extent, we find both in each other. The distraction of the outside acts as mirror for the focus that we should have on the inside while the inside shines a light on the darkness that is the outside. This gives a whole new meaning to Plato’s allegory of the cave.

Shedding Light on Plato's Allegory of the Cave .

Prisoners sit in a cave facing its wall while the only light entering the cave is behind them and they cannot look towards it. They see shadowy figures on the cave's wall and all they come to know over their lives are what these shadows teach them. Hence, they are slaves.

They are slaves, not because they are chained but, due to them only experiencing what the light allows them. They do not learn by their own measure but only by the measure of what other figures allow them to use. If they had no light they would have only had themselves. They would have learned from themselves. They would have tempered their own flames; their own emotions and minds.

In Plato's allegory, one prisoner is somehow freed and escapes into the world, learns from the world and returns to teach his previous peers. They rebuke him and choose to remain in their ignorance. This is Plato's allegory for choosing the life of seeking truth in a world where ignorance is commonplace. Let us try things another way.

Let us say one slave closed his eyes and asked what the lines inside his eyelid are. Maybe that enquiry led him to investigate the sound his throat makes when he swallows and maybe, over time, he got to the point where he asked questions that had nothing to do with any of his five lower senses and nothing to do with his body; what the Ancient Egyptian / Khemites called the Akh.^{xxiii} Maybe at that point, whether eyes are open or closed, he asked existential questions. Well even Plato, being out of the cave, asked those questions. What then is the point of the cave? Whether previous interpretations of Plato's allegory of the cave have been deeply misguided or absolutely correct we should see the allegory in the light I have proposed.

Plato's allegory of the cave should be seen a contemplation upon the lonely road that is the pursuit of knowledge. Such a pursuit is, of course, one variant of a spiritual life. However,

the more important point that many miss, and probably Plato did not even realise, is that the light, whether we perceive it in a cave or in the world, tricks us into misunderstanding who we are and who we are not. It is best to see beyond the light - to dispel it from our minds - than retain it and all it affords us to experience as some great things which enhance our knowledge.

After all, *the more we learn the less we know*. The point of life is not the pursuit of knowledge, Jnana yoga, but what such knowledge brings. What it brings, of course, relies on what we want from it. In that regard, man is the measure of his things. That is why the Buddhists, for example, speak of everyone having a dharma or law by which they live. Let look at my assertion through Hindu ethno-philosophy .

Some experience life best through Karma Yoga (deeds), others by Jnana Yoga (knowledge) and others by Raja Yoga (contemplation). Both Jnana and Raja yoga entail active pursuit of knowledge but can be distinguished by defining the former as what philosophers and scientists do (outward seeking) and the latter as what . Karma Yoga itself will also bring knowledge of self but it is a more passive than active pursuit.

At the end, those who pursue truth, using whatever path, yearn to be sages but if we see the path as the end-goal then we lose our opportunity to become what we are. We lose the opportunity to act upon future potential in the present and, subsequently, fail to build upon the past. We become stuck. Hence, those who believe philosophy to be the highest pursuit of humanity miss the mark and they miss it for two reasons.

Firstly, the we do not gain much from life focusing on highest and lowest. We gain much from it when we learn from experiences: Our and others. Secondly, philosophy is one path in life. There are others.

Our lifepath is tied to our choices and our choices are tied to who we are now and who we are becoming. Philosophy is not for everyone so it is incapable of being the highest path for all of us. It is certainly not the highest path out of the paths but then again there is no high or low. There is only what we gain from life. That is our ultimate achievement.

Plato's returned prisoner, this new teacher, therefore, is very misguided. Firstly, he did what all Western Philosophers since Plato and Pythagoras have done which is wrong. Hence, even Plato recounts in *Timaeus* the Egyptian priest saying to Solon,

“O Solon, Solon, you Hellenes are never anything but children, and there is not an old man among you... in mind you are all young; there is no old opinion handed down among you by ancient tradition, nor any science which is hoary with age.”^{xxiv}

The Greeks taught what they thought they knew without first mastering it and verifying that what they thought they knew was worth knowing or that it was truth at all. Such a task undoubtedly would mean pursuing knowledge for a lifetime without being able to spread it to others and who really wants to do that? It means testing yourself over promoting your ideas. It also means engaging more of the world than you may want to experience. It is the total embrace of self-realisation which may mean the total rejection of what makes us feel safe. It is the total rejection of education in the sense of teaching others. It is the move from the didactic method to that of the autodidact. Funnily enough, autodidactic would leave our contemporary parasitic university system in shambles. Dorothy Sayers has more to say on this move in her work *The Lost Tools of Learning*^{xxv} but let me say this.

There are great implications for a society where education centres on self-discovery over eating what is put on the plate. For one, there would be fewer educated people and more knowledgeable people. Secondly, those wielding political power would be subject to informed

citizens instead of ignorant ones. Thirdly, the mode of political economy may have to change to suit a more self-directed individual but that is subject to the extent to which self-direction or the lack of it is a key component of capitalism. Fourthly, the politics of society would become truly rule by the people, more participatory and more mature. That may have implications for the naïve first past the post systems pervading the world in favour proportional representation or something else as well as issues concerning prisoner voting, restoration of voting rights after incarceration, a re-look of the role of men and women in society, a fundamental re-think of what a jury of peers means and ultimately a re-examination of who can vote and when but let us get back on point.

How do you know that what you know is true? Didactic teaching should be secondary to the autodidactic method; if only for this simple truth. After we learn all we can learn from school and what others tell us we must still go in the world and verify these things for ourselves! There is, of course, the stark reality that there are many of us who would rather be fed than hunt. We must not be naïve in thinking otherwise.

However, for the few of us who act upon our potential, the few of us who actually move our families, societies, civilisations and humanity forward to wherever we are going, the tools of progress lay not in didactics but in autodidactics. The progress of humanity is built upon self-discovery: Not what is already known. What is already known is, of course, foundational but the foundation is always compacted by 'more' and that 'more' may also seek to excavate the 'known' by showing its error and replacing it with itself. Imposing information upon others without room for them to discover for themselves will doom us all to stagnation.

That is not to say that one cannot spread one's ideas but the returned prisoner is foolhardy to believe that upon spreading his ideas his former peers will want what he is

offering. Does he not remember being a prisoner and being happy with what he had? Now that he has what he thinks is more he cannot contemplate being a slave of the light anymore but the funny thing is he is still a slave of the light: He just has more of it than they do.

The worst thing for the returned prisoner would be if it turned out to be the case that all he saw in the world was either a reflection of something else not seen or worse yet; just as much as the same as what he saw in the cave. After all, what he saw on the wall of the cave was the shadow of what he now sees outside of the cave. He is seeing the same thing; just with different perception. This is why it is better to hone your abilities than it is to seek more. The returned prisoner, in many ways, is just what we say he is: A prisoner enslaved to what he believes to be knowledge. While the returned prisoner is busy teaching he is lost to discovery. He is stagnant and everything he teaches becomes stale.

At the end, if one improves one's self one will naturally know more but if one seeks more knowledge without attaining the tools to decipher what he has "attained" that person will just have information. That is why it is said in The Bible, "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them".^{xxvi} That is why we are instructed: *Know thyself, and thou shalt know the universe and God.*^{xxvii} This didactic, does not say to us to stop at someone's door and beg for what that person has. It tells us to open our own door and forage for food; for *mana*.

Teaching, as great as it is, is just another pursuit in life. It only turns into a spiritual pursuit when we teach so that we may learn. Your desire to help others, as noble as you believe it to be, is just another thing in life. It only becomes Karmic – it only takes on movement and

acts upon you, thus transforming you into more of you than you have ever been - when you learn from it.

The difference between the Philosopher and the Sage is that the sage knows that the best way to save others is to first save yourself. The philosopher still wonders if this is true and entertains all sorts of fanciful ideas of freedom instead of participating in the exercise of freedom itself. The philosopher is a perennial ponderer because he has been taught to engage every thinker instead of engaging every possibility that his own thought.

Philosophers learn from other philosophers. Every generation becomes a footnote to the next just as Whitehead says that all of Western Philosophy, true or untrue, is a footnote to Plato.^{xxviii} Apart from superficial differences that act within the same regime. The word regime here is used purposely because philosophers act as a caste. Especially Western ones. Each wants to perfect Plato in some way. Even Hegel and his dialectics. No one is looking to perfect himself. What if the root not only contains some disease but is completely rotten? They would never know. They would never know because they have spent so much time fixated upon a northern star and such little time upon self.

While many philosophers have been autodidacts they have, unfortunately, discovered themselves into the same patterns as others who came before them. A lot of that is brought about by the now commonplace sense that you need to find a knowledge gap so you must read everyone else before working on your ideas. Hence, philosophers - didactics and autodidacts - talk often in the same dispassion, write in the same tone and use the same sterile language. This critique extends to all of academia as well. The same pattern we find in other occupations with their own particular behaviours such as lawyer, doctors, engineers and politicians.

Who cares if you trod where others have trod and say the same things? Will you somehow fail to advance knowledge or waste time? Surely, if you say something someone else said but in a way now only you can say it you may bring more understanding to it.

There is a time to engage the world and its ideas and there is a time to engage you and yours. Know the difference. Maybe this is why Wittgenstein is said to be unreadable. He did not write like the usual philosopher. Arguably because he did not take the time in the early and middle stages of his career to read them. He did not become a sycophant and I dare say that the more philosophers move away from the heard the more they become great. That is why Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, C.L.R. James and Stuart Hall stand out to me and why so many of my fellow Caribbean scholars do not.

To establish themselves in the world, Caribbean scholars, like others from the previously colonised world, think they must prove themselves to the world and to prove themselves to the world they believe they must become the world so they divest themselves of themselves and cling to someone else. However, one need not be of the world to be something of meaning to the world. No doubt someone reading this work, with all of its flavour, will say, "This is not a work of philosophy!" thus proving my point!

The philosopher runs in circles thinking while the sage stops running because he knows freedom is attained through discovery of Self: Not discovery of things. Hence, the sage stills himself while the philosopher keeps pursuing and falling in love with the pursuit more than he falls in love with himself. Let us again dispel the dichotomous argument that may develop by saying there is time to run and a time stop.

We run so we can stop. We never stop so we can run. If we want to catch our breath we pause and some pauses are longer than others. Similarly we place 'commas', 'inverted commas',

'colons', 'semi-colons' and 'ellipses' in sentences to denote pauses of varying lengths and moments of import and reflection but there is only one 'full' stop, period.

At the end of every race is a finish line. Philosophy for philosophy's sake is not philosophy if philosophy means pursuit of knowledge. As we know philosophy means love of wisdom (from the Greek 'Philo' and 'Sophia' translated to 'Love' and 'Wisdom' respectively in English) and there really is a difference between pursuing knowledge and loving it. Now that we have this etymological understanding of philosophy you should have a greater appreciation of the reason why we have taken on a borderline spiritual concept as a point of enquiry^{xxix}.

Sophia is not only the term for wisdom but has been the term for and impetus of humanity's creation through the begetting of the Demiurge (Yaldabaoth as the Platonic Gnostics called Him) by the Aeon Sophia (the female companion of Christ and one portion of the One True God). Similarly, the Dogon People of Mali today, those who led the world to the Sirius Constellation and are rumoured decedents of the Ancient Khemetic people called Sophia and Yaldabaoth Amma and Yurugu respectively. From the Demiurge, the half-maker god Plato references in *Timeus* and the Unmoved Mover or Prime Mover referenced by Aristotle in Book 12 of *Metaphysics* we get all of the creation that we know, including our bodies while our spirits are parts of Sophia trapped within the body seeking to liberate our souls from slavish captivity.

This is very similar to the story of the forbidden fruit in Abrahamic Religions. Seen in that I posit the view that philosophy is not the act of loving wisdom but the act of being the lover of wisdom in the nounal sense where the Greek 'Philos' means 'friend' in English as

opposed to 'Philo' the adjective. After all, the Greek work 'Philosophie' is a noun not an adjective.

Philosophising, therefore, is a procreative act: The act of becoming the Christ on Earth where the Greek 'Khristos' means 'anointed' in English. The same as 'Māāsiah' in Hebrew. When we pursue wisdom, we shed ignorance and, as we consume wisdom, we become anointed as Knowledgeable. That is why in the Aeonic Dodecad Sophia is paired with Thêletos; Greek for 'Willed' or 'Longed for'. We, the neophytes, the Tarot's Fool, strive to be the Hermit / Sage. We long for wisdom and in attaining it we become enabled to not only think for ourselves but control our destinies.

Philosophy can be a path to wisdom but who wants to be the least wise among the sages when he can be the most knowledgeable among the ignorant? Instead, you can be a fool sitting at the feet of wisdom, idolising her striving to taste her fully. The true philosopher is the one who does not wish to always be a philosopher. Philosopher is just another rank on the ladder to becoming more of yourself. Today you are the philosopher-You. Tomorrow, you are the Sage-you. The next day, or in days to come, you are You. Think about all of the things we have missed because we have been acting, as we would say in Barbados, "follow-pattern".

Philosophical debate for debate's sake and not for the experience of the truth lying behind the things studied is foolery. When will returned prisoners, philosophers, realise that the more and more they pursue knowledge without an end the more and more they will know nothing? When will they realise that the world is not them and they are not in control of what and how people should know themselves and the world around them?

The only time we are not in the cave is when we still ourselves, close ourselves away from the light and focus on the darkness within us. After all, the only thing we know we can truly know is our selves. It is not God or any other idea, person or thing: Only ourselves. Even one's self is not a sure thing. The world is as much an illusion as our knowledge of it since we are hardly sure that it is there. It works both ways really. We hardly know the world is there and we hardly know that we know what we think we know about what is there.

Take for instance the words of Sontag in her application of Plato's allegory to the practice of Photography. She writes,

"Humankind lingers unregenerately in Plato's cave, still reveling, its age-old habit, in mere images of the truth. But being educated by photographs is not like being educated by older, more artisanal images... Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from not accepting the world as it looks. All possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no. Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph"^{xxx}.

Similarly, no one finds knowledge in knowing things. Just like a photograph, the knowledge today's so-called philosophers seek is memory. Just an aesthetic. It has no purpose beyond pleasing the desires of those who possess it and those who possess it hardly desire to move beyond possession to actual understanding. They prefer mental masturbation over material and spiritual sustenance.

To move towards understanding is to become ignorant once again in every nook and cranny there is to find about things and yourself you never knew you did not know about those things and yourself. It is a scary activity and ignorance, darkness, is a scary place to in which be situated.

Whether it is a photograph, live image, brail or something heard, our “knowing” of things, if only left as memory, is nothing more than information. For as we should know, knowledge is information in use. Knowledge is experience and freedom is the achievement of self-determination through knowledge. The world can only give you information. You have to make knowledge. The only world is our world and our world is ourselves. When we release this we will know more freedom than a thousand books can bring.

That is why I find sense in these words from Sontag,

“The limit of photographic knowledge of the world is that, while it can goad conscience, it can, finally, never be ethical or political knowledge. The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist... Needing to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted. Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies; it is the most irresistible form of mental pollution. Poignant longings for beauty, for an end to probing below the surface, for a redemption and celebration of the body of the world - all these elements of erotic feeling are affirmed in the pleasure we take in photographs”^{xxxi}.

Our world as we know it, being so dominated by the love of knowledge of things, has been distracted from the pursuit and attainment of freedom through attaining information to used as knowledge for our own good. Freedom now is a myth for most. Those who see beyond the mirage of distraction know it is attainable but even fewer than those attain it since the path is long and the challenges are tailor-made to be arduous for each of us.

However, if you do want to pursue freedom here at two ways of doing it. Either we pursue self by only looking inward or we pursue self by using knowledge of the outside to find the inside. Either way, one leads to the other. Both are the same.

How to Pursue Freedom

If I look inward my whole life without experiencing other people or things I will never truly live. Similarly, I cannot truly live without ever experience who I am when others are not there. How will I ever even know, on the most basic of levels, how to handle the challenges that life gives me and life does challenge me. Life challenges me both by what others do and what I do in relation to others. Thirdly, life challenges me in relation to how I interact with myself.

Hence, when it is asked, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” and it is answered, “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works”^{xxxii} we are told that the spirit gains from the earth just as the earth gains from the spirit. Our life is as good as our actions and our actions show who we are. To invoke Rex Nettleford, the inward stretch is the outward reach in this battle for space.^{xxxiii}

Know Thy Self

In the end, we are who we are. It does not matter if we are living or dead, on earth or in Heaven. We remain who we are. We are remembered by our deeds and we learn by them. Hence, when the materiality of life stands in our way the choice is ours to use what presents in our lives for our betterment or detriment let alone that of the world.

To be who we are we must know ourselves. To know ourselves we must search for ourselves but that means both looking inwards and outwards. Depending on our personalities either one or both might be difficult. Surely, the possibility of both being easily done is slim since the essence of our spiritual path is experiencing challenge. Somewhere along the line, we

face adversity and it always comes down to knowing ourselves. Instead of thinking that life gets in the way we should realise that life is the way. The issue at hand, I realise, is not living a spiritual life in opposition to my earthly struggles but realising that my earthly struggles are what constitute my spiritual life. I am, therefore, confronted by the reality that earthly and spiritual life are the same and the only thing standing in the way of my progress on this path is the choice to accept that the more I go on my path the more I will struggle.

Conclusion

Life is a spiritual experience. Whether we sit still or move we are experiencing life and it is teaching us something about ourselves and everything that is not us. However, there is something to be said about the lifepath of actively seeking spiritual experience through life. Can one really ever really appreciate the spirit in life without first choosing to seek it throughout his lifetime?

While anything is possible it is quite unlikely that living a lifetime where one does not choose to seek truth will yield better or even the same results as one who seeks. It can even be argued that those who choose not to seek truth have chosen their own spiritual path. The reality is that choice, more specifically self-determination, no matter the determination, is key to the spiritual path.

At the heart of all choice, behind all doors, is experience of self and non-self. If you choose to not open any door or just never do so you remain where you started. At least you will not remain how you started for the passage of time, the only difference between creation and existence, means that you will be different in some way but you will be less than everyone else

who chose to do something and in so doing became more of the selves they never knew they were.

Why fear the unknown? We are taught that *Curiosity killed the cat* but what about the rest? *Curiosity killed the cat but satisfaction brought it back*. Life is death in more than one way and anyone who seeks knowledge, especially in a world that would rather you not have it, will suffer countless living deaths before reaching the end.

If it is as Socrates is reported to have said and, “The unexamined life is not worth living” then what have you gained by exploring the whole universe save for yourself? The pursuit of self is a path longer than any other, filled with more difficulty than one can imagine and it is all made to suit you. Unlike the outside world, in whose challenges we must all share, there is a hidden world – one only made for each of us – which can bring us the joy that we all may seek – freedom – but it will come at a great cost. It will mean abandoning the world as we know it and clinging to the unknown and who wants to do that?

When humans are done thinking about the world there will still be more examining to do. That is to say that one envelopes the other. One is somewhat greater than the other; at least in the sense of birthing the other. Examining or the pursuit of knowledge envelops thinking ‘in pursuit’.

Hence, Descartes must be thrown off at some point in favour of ‘me’. That is to say that we must transition from ‘I think, therefore, I am’ to ‘I am as I am. For what I am is that I am’. When we realise that thinking is a mere tool to help us transcend who we first were, as in who we were before birth, who we were at birth and who we are after birth but before death, we realise that the key to this understanding lies in this: ‘I am what I am as I am’.

Descartes, like Protagoras, started with his thought instead of his existence. He started with the manifestation of his existence instead of its being. He only glimpsed through the veil of creation and humans, especially, those heavily influenced by the western world have struggled to move past the representation of themselves, the thoughts that limit their minds and ultimately, their minds themselves, towards just knowing themselves without thinking about who they are. For every thought is conjecture upon the ideal and ideal can only be the actual ideal if it actually what it is and not what we think, want or suppose it to be.

Endnotes

ⁱ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant)* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

ⁱⁱ I imply here that we first exist then subsist then live.

ⁱⁱⁱ Implied here is that life comes before death always.

^{iv} "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Genesis 3:19.

^v Again, I implied here a triad: Creator, Will / Power and Begetter. This triad is a bit unusual and is not something I am completely sold on when taken to the most logical conclusion that there is a cooperative relationship between two unseen gods. One being God before Creation and the God of Creation. One being pre-Primordial and the other Primordial. One being the Ruler of Aeons and the other the ruler of Archons. Surely the two rule but do they cooperate and is that cooperation active or passive through antagonisms which play out between Spirit and Body through the mind? I shall explore this somewhere else but for now, if you must have an answer, find it for yourself. I do not know. What is important here is that this triad shows us something new that has never been said anywhere else. There is a higher triad. A triad of triads. In it are seated three rulers. The Demiurge who Creates, The One God who emanates and the sentient beings of free will like humans who are the manifestation of both Gods who wield the fire of imagination to bring about self-determination.

^{vi} I recognise that calling a tear a 'being' may be quite strange. Indeed, it is quite strange to me, but maybe that is because we have a very human centred approach to 'being' (Gerund) and have yet to move from a sense of being to a definition of it.

^{vii} Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Harcourt, Brace & Company, Inc., 1922)90.

^{viii} See Introduction by Bertrand Russell.

^{ix} *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Psalm 46:10.

^x In his *Discourse on the Method* René Descartes says "Cogito, Ergo Sum" / "I think therefore I am" and sets the scene for contemporary ego-centric metaphysics. Of course he was preceded as earlier as the pre-Socratics by Protagoras who in his work entitled *Truth* which is the backdrop for contemporary relativism: The sort of thing through which we find no absolute truth: No truth at all.

^{xi} Paget Henry, "Afro-Caribbean Philosophy: An Introduction." *The CLR James Journal* 4, no. 1 (1993): 2-11. Accessed February 3, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/26759351.

^{xii} Ann M. Kinney, *The Meaning of Dialectic in Plato*: 230.

^{xiii} Julie E. Maybee, "Hegel's Dialectics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/hegel-dialectics/>>.

^{xiv} Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other*. (SUNY Press, 1992) 46, note 37.

^{xv} Both Kant and Hegel discussed existence through the concepts of the concrete, abstract and absolute.

^{xvi} Protagoras, *Truth*. "Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not"

^{xvii} Some people gain insight without thinking while some experience the after life. Others see beings and others have dreams of past lives and the future.

^{xviii} "All the proof of a pudding, is in the eating" - William Camden, *Remaines of a Greater Worke, Concerning Britaine Dictionary of cliché* (Palala Press, 2016)

^{xix} Barack Obama's Statement on the Observance of Diwali, obamawhitehouse.archives.gov. November 1, 2013

^{xx} 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "The Nonexistence of Evil." Some Answered Questions. Retrieved 2012-11-21.

^{xxi} Karen D. Pyke, "What is Internalized Racial Oppression and Why Don't We Study It? Acknowledging Racism's Hidden Injuries" (2010) *Sociological Perspectives*. 53 No. 4: 551-572.

^{xxii} Todd Calder, "The Concept of Evil", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/concept-evil/>>.

^{xxiii} S. G. F. Brandon, *Man and his destiny in the great religions: An historical and comparative study containing the Wilde Lectures in Natural and Comparative Religion delivered in the University of Oxford, 1954-1957* (University Press, 1963) 44; Louis V. Zabkar, "Herodotus and the Egyptian Idea of Immortality." (1963) *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22, No. 1: 57-63;

^{xxiv} Plato, *Timaeus*

^{xxv} Dorothy Sayers, *The Lost Tools of Learning*, (GLH Publishing, 2017)

^{xxvi} *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Matthew 13:15-17.

^{xxvii} Inscription at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

^{xxviii} "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" Alfred North Whitehead, 'Process and Reality' (Free Press, 1979) 39.

^{xxix} I dare not say philosophical, scholarly or intellectual enquiry since (1) that would betray our ethos about going beyond Philosophy and (2) this pursuit is, indeed, one broader and deeper than philosophical enquiry.

^{xxx} Susan Sontag, *In Plato's Cave* from *On Photography* (Delta Books, 1977) 3-24.

^{xxxi} *Ibid*

^{xxxii} *The Holy Bible*, King James Version Matthew 16:26-27

^{xxxiii} Rex M Nettleford, *Inward stretch, outward reach: A voice from the Caribbean* (Macmillan Caribbean; 1st edition, 1993).